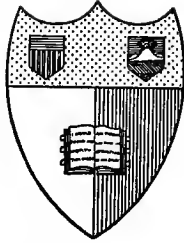


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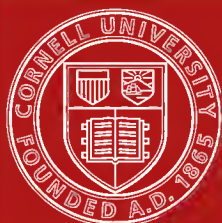
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REASONS
DEMANDING AN ANSWER.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE BASIS OF WHAT
IS COMMONLY CALLED

CHRISTIANITY.

LONDON:
W. P. COLLINS,
Scientific Bookseller,
157, GREAT PORTLAND STREET, W.

1883.

L. h.

P R E F A C E .

THIS little essay contains the matured thoughts of an elderly man—"Reasons" which deserve to be honestly weighed; and though various may be the conclusions, good will in every case be the result.

When faith in God supersedes faith in fable, the consolation becomes intellectual religion instead of hyperbolical fancy. But childish associations, reiterated impressions, and love of the marvellous, are hard to be overcome, be they ever so absurd. Nothing but honest and sincere desire for truth can avail. God is Truth. If this little book at all excites or assists that desire, the author will be fully recompensed.

Let the Reader first read the Text, and whenever he disputes the assertion therein, refer to the Notes. Words or phrases annotated are printed in the Text in italics.

H. S.

REASONS DEMANDING AN ANSWER.

I PROTEST against the religion *commonly called* Note 1.
Christian on Religious, Rational, and Historical
grounds :—

First: Because it founds the belief in God and
the duties of man upon *the Bible*, making them Note 2.
derivatives of Bible expressions; whereas belief in
some divine *supreme Energy*, Power, Person or Note 3.
system and our relation thereto, is founded in the
nature of man. Religion thus becomes an intel-
lectual and moral necessity, an essential to hu-
manity far anterior to the Bible, and not depending
for existence on *adopting* Bible conjectures to the Note 4.
exclusion of present knowledge and *thought*. The Note 5.
fictions of religion cannot be its foundation nor
belief in them its essential.

Secondly: Because it substitutes belief in a *story* Note 6.
for faith in God, and a *fictitious* system for His Note 7.
moral and actual governance as displayed to us by
our reason, our senses, and our moral faculties.

Thirdly: Because by the usurpation of religion
and the assumption of divinity it *arrogates* truth to Note 8.
rumours, legends and theories which are probably
(or at least liable to be) falsehoods, thus making
them superior to our faculties of judgment, criti-
cism and moral discrimination. By thus consti-
tuting Bible statements into the “words of God,”

Note 9. the Bible becomes their *God*, which is nothing short of book-idolatry.

To support this idolatry it is essential to believe a thoroughly repugnant mythology, viz.—

Note 10. That two Gods in heaven before the creation of the world agreed to act various parts. One was to create man and doom him to everlasting *misery*.

Note 11. The other was to take manhood upon himself for a few years, to die a violent death and to remain dead for some portion of *forty hours*—which was to propitiate the former god so far that every man

Note 12. who *believes* this story is to be saved and all the rest are to be eternally damned.

To make this credible it again assumes that this compact was fulfilled by Jesus whom forty-one years after his birth it first designates as Christ the second personal *God*.

Note 13.

To give this super-assumption the colour of rationality, it religiously demands and assumes as axiomatic that every vague expression, every rhapsodical denunciation, every jubilant utterance in the *Jewish canon* is to be considered as a veritable promise from God, which (of course) must be

Note 14.

fulfilled by and applied to *Jesus*; consequently

Note 15.

Note 16. to avoid the blasphemy of God being a *liar*, every ingenious device, every contortion of fact, every mythical interpretation, every imaginary fulfilment of grotesque type, becomes a religious necessity, and is resorted to as a religious duty to

Note 17.

distort the one to the *other*. The audacious assumption (the compact) and super-assumption (the fulfilment) prove each other to be facts, and thus the truth of Christian doctrine is established. This

is Christian logic! This is Paul's theory which was dominant with the writers of the *New Testament*. Note 18.

We have no real *biography* of Jesus, but only Note 19.
 four accounts which have any pretence to authenticity in relating a few incidents and discourses, and to which Christians refer in vindication of pseudo-prophecy; whether they are condensed into *one or three* years is unimportant, excepting to Note 20.
 show the unreliability of the record. The gospels are quite insufficient to show an immaculate, faultless, unique life; that super-human knowledge and purity directed every act and thought from his cradle to his tomb, which is necessary for the Christian doctrine to form a Christian God, for it is not deemed sufficient to believe he was always a religious, pure, contemplative person, in degree very high, but in kind only equal to thousands of other men. It is on this hyperbolical supposition, and not on any proof of its truth, that all Christian doctrines depend.

But if it is *possible* that the accounts which nar- Note 21.
 rate those incidents can be non-genuine, unauthentic, or the result of infatuation, misconception, or credulity; if error can in any way be mixed up in them, then in the same degree is it probable that many of the items are falsehoods, and that the whole superstructure of doctrine is a fallacy, for perfect undeniable truth cannot rest on such a foundation. As I am convinced that the gospels (as we have them) are adulterated and unreliable, a history of rumours and credulities more than of facts, that they have been compiled with intensity of purpose in a foreign language long after the narrated events,

- Note 22. *interchanging and interloping* for upwards of 350 years with a fixed fanatical *aim*, it would be contrary to nature if they did not select, invent and exaggerate for the purpose of deifying Jesus and fulfilling *pseudo-prophecy*. I therefore discard their corroborations as insufficient to support the absurdities of Christian mythology and dogma, which both reason and faith in the unity of truth must alike *reject*, viz.—
- Note 23.
- Note 24.

1st. That though before the foundation of the world there were two coequal covenanting parties, yet the whole time there were not two but only one party, for the two were one!

2nd. Christians believe in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, and in the Devil the God of evil, all distinct persons and complete in themselves, yet they only believe in one God! believe the Father and Son to be of equal age and antiquity!

3rd. The legion of absurdities logically resulting, such as the governance of the universe during the sojourn of the Godship upon earth in the shape of, and confined to, one man Jesus. The irrationality of the unevidenced and irreligious assertion, that the Eternal God of the universe was appeased (thus implying pleased) by the unrighteous murder of an innocent victim — that He was in fact a party and accessory to the act. That an abnormal birth and resurrection reverses the whole plan of God and destiny of mankind.

That belief in this, though unsupported by anything like evidence, changes eternal misery into eternal happiness, and the detested of God into His

beloved. That if belief was of such supreme importance to us, and so pleasing to God, surely an Omnipotent, perfect, righteous and merciful God would have given us perfect and convincing evidence, without which the astounding miracle would be worse than void, and would be but a snare to entrap the truth-searching man into disbelief and consequent hell. Besides the numerous contradictions and incongruities arising out of the essential doctrines such as election, vicarious substitution, effects of Baptism, transubstantiation or consubstantiation, judgment day, resurrection of the identical body, &c., &c., none of which have any ostensible place in the governance of this world or any evidence of reality—they are fabricated myths, dictations to God, and at enmity with true and expanded religion.

4th. That the “Glorious Gospel of salvation” presupposes an awful, universal and eternal damnation; it is a mere subterfuge to get God and a portion of mankind out of this most irreligious, irrational and horrifying pre-assumption.

5th. To create the idea of a merciful and loving God by redemption, it libels the eternal First Cause by imagining Him to be a most unmitigatedly malicious and whimsical demon, creating man for hell, and hell for man, then partially nullifying His original decree, because His wrath is appeased.

For the above reasons I repudiate Jesuism (commonly called Christianity) as a false and pernicious *superstition* imposed on humanity by threats and Note 25. bribes, and I reject the Christian system and doctrine as thoroughly repugnant to true religion, to

- Notes 26, 27. reason, to evidence, and to instinct, as dishonouring to *God* and degrading to *man*, a fiction antagonistic to sensible reality, involving scientific and religious absurdities by assuming principles and facts which have no existence in the ordination of *God*.
- Note 28.
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NOTES.

NOTE 1.

CHRISTIAN was not the original name of the disciples of Jesus, but it was the name of a pre-Jesus established Church, which was fast superseding Paganism ; and the followers of Paul, by adopting the name, appropriated to themselves the prestige, endowments and sentiments of that religion, and thus obtained many converts. Christ was not a Hebrew word or idea, but was adopted as a subsequent interpretation of the word Messiah (though Christ and Messiah have not the same signification) ; therefore, whenever it is used in the Gospels, it only proves that the writer belonged to Paul's school, and used the "interpretation" ; it does not prove that the word was used or the idea applied at the time stated, but rather proves the later and foreign authorship or intermeddling.

This is not mere conjecture, but to me, a provable fact by the following arguments :—The root of the idea Christ seems to me to be perfection, purity, beauty. Homer names his beautiful captivating captive Chryseis ; Krishna was also the name of a Hindu deity worshipped long before Jesus, and well known to the Egyptian Greeks ; but the word Christ before and at the time of Jesus meant "anointed one," and thence, the "chosen," "beloved," etc., most likely from the association of cleanliness and purity with anointment, and "Christian" meant a religious sect who adopted anointing as a mystic rite. Now, neither Jesus or any of his disciples had any claim to the name of Christ or Christian on the score of anointing ; their rite was baptism ; but about the year 42, at Antioch, his disciples were *first* called Christians, which implies that the name of Christ was first associated with Jesus, thus modifying and uniting the two beliefs into one Church. Now Christ was a Grecian word and idea, and Antioch was a Grecian city ; Paul and Barnabas were preaching to the Greeks, and assembled themselves for one

whole year with the Church and taught much people. What Church? Evidently the pre-existing Christian Church, whose name they adopted and thus gained proselytes.

Again : James v. 14 acknowledges the existence of *elders* in an anointing or Christian Church, and exhorts them to anoint in the name of the Lord whose coming draweth nigh (ver. 8), thereby uniting Disciples and Christians ; also Acts xx. 17 sent to Ephesus to call the *Elders* ; also Eph. i. 1-12 : " Paul to the saints who are in Ephesus, the faithful in *Christ-Jesus* ; . . . we who first trusted in *Christ*." 1 Cor. iv. 14 is tantamount to this : " Though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet in the gospel of *Jesus-Christ* you have only one father, even myself." " My gospel which I learned from no man " (Gal. i. 12-30). Theophilus of Antioch was a Christian who knew nothing of Jesus, but relied on anointing. Titian was the same ; holy oil was also the faith of the Emperor Servius (A.D. 260). Apollos (Acts xviii. 24) was a preacher from Alexandria, who was ignorant of Jesus until he was instructed by Paul's companions Aquila and Priscilla. Also Rom. i. 8 : " To all that be in Rome, called to be saints : I thank God that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." What faith ? The Gospels were not then written ! Paul's theories were only beginning to be preached ! If they were Christians at all their Christianity must have been independent of Jesus, some exaggerated rumours may have reached them which some may have believed, and called that credulity religion ; but the theories of atoning sacrifice, vicarious propitiation, etc., which were the adaptations of Paul's imagination to Jewish rites, the very essence of New Testament Christianity, were not then attached to the word Christ, or to the Christian belief.

Paul's preaching was entirely that Jesus is Christ, that the two terms are synonymous and the ideas identical and interchangeable ; that Christ—eternal perfection and purity always instigating God's actions and metaphorically sitting on His right hand—means Jesus, the son of David, literally doing so ; and that Jesus being born and crucified is the same as the eternal principle of good being born and crucified—Christ born, and Christ crucified.

On this muddle of ideas hangs the whole of Paul's fanciful philosophy which is called Christianity. Paul's three years' study at Alexandria (previous to his preaching at Antioch) familiarized him with Christian sublimities which have no reference to

Jesus or his teaching, but are traceable to Plato and Philo, and are quotations from Greek philosophers. In fact the teaching of Jesus is ignored by Paul; the assumed death and resurrection are the only facts relied on by him, enabling him fancifully to apply prophecy which otherwise was a dead letter, and thus to unite Hellenic thought with Jewish superstition.

NOTE 2.

Popular Christianity founds religion, both in belief and conduct, entirely upon the Bible, and grants Bible authority entirely on its own assumption. The Bible alone testifies to itself; it requires no corroboration and repudiates even confirmation, for all its assertions are by virtue of assertion made facts, and all its reasonings are infallible. This is Christianity as taught by the Church for 1,800 years: Believe in God because the Bible tells you; believe in six days' creation because the Bible tells you; believe in the scheme of salvation because it is derivable from the Bible; believe in each miracle related in the Bible, *as a fact*, and this will react on your mind in demonstration of Bible supremacy, without which all your hopes and beliefs collapse. Absurdity or contradiction does not authorise disbelief, though to quiet disbelief you may try to reconcile; but irrationality and incongruity only enhance submission to faith, for the fault is in our intellects, not in the Bible.

Thus it is that the Bible is constituted a God superior to our faculties; it is blasphemy to dispute it; its predictions must be fulfilled, whether we understand them or not; its every expression is hallowed, and thus a canonical miscellany becomes the object of faith, or in other words your God. Not only belief but morality is by the Christian Church founded on the Bible; its dictates and derivatives constitute morality, there is no appeal, no higher obedience; whereas true morality is founded on the exigencies of our nature and correct deductions therefrom, which may or may not be contained in the Bible, or which may be thoroughly opposed to Bible dictates. Thus for instance the Bible more than permits, it glorifies polygamy, and enjoins rapine. (Num. xxxi.) Kill every male and matron, but keep the virgins alive for yourselves. It forbids murder, yet it orders extermination without mercy, and holds up the man of God, Elijah, as an example for killing two sets of fifty men for bringing him a message, and Elisha for cursing little children. It forbids the likeness of any animal being made and revered,

yet, immediately after, orders them to make and reverence a brazen serpent. It ignores both natural and rational results, making events the effects of capricious whim of a petulant God, or His compliant answer to some one's prayer. Thus God is represented as spontaneously evil, the instigation to good being human.

NOTE 3.

The word and the idea God is so frequently used in this treatise that I think it advisable to state that I use it in its most universal sense. God is to human faculty an undefinable idea. We cannot entify God. Unlimited person is to us a contradiction, and person is a compound—a result of pre-existing causes and elements, and cannot be a first cause. Yet person, though manifestly false and deficient, may convey to us the truest conception of God which we are capable of, and for this purpose I use the term personally. In both individual and social infancy man's conception of government is patriarchal. A government requires a personal governor, and a creation requires a personal creator. Laws and results are radiations; love, loyalty, and obedience, correlative attractions. Neither could exist independent of person.

But as man advances to maturity he perceives that an impersonal republic may be substituted for a personal monarch without destroying either law or loyalty. Devotion and love may exist though the person be removed. A permeating principle may be recognised instead of a person, diffusion instead of centralisation. This may illustrate to us how it is possible that God may be better defined and understood by unlimited expansion than by contraction, by principle rather than person—the origin of every existence, source of every truth, the soul of the universe, etc. But after all these sublime titles we are not one whit nearer the comprehension of the Eternal or defining the unlimited. It may be asked then, What is the use of this fanciful theology? Much every way! The conviction that the idea God transcends human conception, elevates religion beyond trivial rites and ceremonies, while it really adds sublimity to devotion, and compels science to worship. It sweeps away all false gods, grotesque superstitions, and mythological beliefs. It pronounces the application of God to Jesus an impossibility—an ineffable degradation of the idea, and all priestcraft and pretensions to divinity sink into insignificance.

False ideas of God produce evils; superstitions, mental degra-

dation and baneful actions (but not hell-fire) are the results. Evils are inseparable from fallacies and imperfections. God, the consummation of perfection, is alone exempt from them.

NOTE 4.

Christians consider that the adopting of unnatural and irrational conjectures constitutes religion. The subjugation of nature and reason to credulity in the name of religion is the very life essence of their religion, the change of surmise into certainty without evidence or transmuting action. For example, the plague *resulting from* numbering the people (2 Sam. xxiv.), the frequency of victory depending on striking the floor with an arrow (2 Kings xiii.), (Tenterden steeple and Goodwin sands are in nature the same); the talismanic name of Jesus added to a prayer makes it efficacious; the blood of Jesus washing away sin; baptism the same, and such like mysticisms of which the Bible is full—denying all those things is not irreligion, it is not rejecting God or disputing His providence. True religion demands rejection of falsehood as much as acceptance of truth. Christianity inculcates “believe all things.”

NOTE 5.

How frequently is inquiry stifled by such arguments as these. Presume to arraign God’s word? The disbeliever or doubter is damned! Faith in the Gospel story is the only salvation! It is a religious duty to believe every statement, even against proof; for intellect and conflicting truths must all submit to religious assumption. Is not this excluding present knowledge and thought? The sacredness of a book being a religious conjecture, it cannot truthfully be adduced to raise its own statements beyond conjecture.

NOTE 6.

For instance, Christians’ consciousness of God’s love to man is made to depend on the belief that He gave up His only son to redeem us; if this belief is shaken, God’s love, according to Christian doctrine, disappears, the incongruous imagination being rejected, only God’s wrath remains. Christian faith in a good God is entirely founded on belief in the salvation story; it repudiates faith on any other terms, and in fact makes it impossible, for faith cannot co-exist with the idea of inevitable eternal

perdition, torture, and enmity with God ; some story of salvation is necessary to neutralise damnation, and belief in that story is a substitute for faith in God.

NOTE 7.

There is no evidence whatsoever for the salvation story outside the New Testament statements, and its assertions derive their authority merely from audacious assumption of inspiration. The bribe held out by hope overcomes incongruities, warps honest judgment, and suborns faith. The story like *any other fiction* may be congruous in itself, and may be beautifully conceived to attract admiration by its astounding wonderment, may excite piety or heroism, and exercise imagination and ingenuity ; but as there is no sensible evidence to bring it into the region of reality, it still remains a fiction or fable. Symmetry in plan does not prove actuality, nor grandeur of conception prove real existence ; therefore, admitting symmetry of plan and grandeur of conception to belong to the Christian scheme is not admitting or even corroborating the truth of the story ; it is equally applicable to fiction and romance.

NOTE 8.

It is religious assumption that transmutes statues into idols—or ideal gods—and makes priests or books holy, and their interpretations fact-controlling and super-rational. To the votary's imagination enduing the wildest chimeras, either Christian or pagan, with reality, in spirit and principle all false religions are the same—proving the miraculous by enduing legends with truth, though devoid of evidence and not having the slightest element of truth about them ; such like are the “miraculous birth,” the “temptation,” the changing resuscitation into “resurrection,” also *all* the miracles ; they being by no means so well authenticated as many of the mediæval miracles now admitted to be false, such as the curing the evil by the touch of the king, from Edward the Confessor to Charles II., avouched by thousands of cases ; the facts of witchcraft affirmed by thousands of judicial decrees and executions—surely this ought to teach us to scrutinize evidence before we admit abnormal facts, or receive former belief as proof of truth. If we admit Bible miracles how can we reject others as impossible or nonsensical ? A principle once admitted cannot be restricted to a few recorded incidents. Religious assumption also juggles ideas into entities, and imaginative or conjectural into

absolute and actual, not by acting on the things themselves but on our minds, by overawing reason, nullifying sense, and blinding judgment ; thus creating ideal truth without evidence of fact, and then deducing fact from this spuriously created "truth." Is not this the very vitality of Christian belief ?

NOTE 9.

Any person who considers it blasphemy to dispute the Bible constitutes it a God. To any person who acknowledges it holy, sacred, and super-rational, to him it is a God. Any person who makes it superior to human intellect, subjugating his moral, rational and religious faculties to it, thereby fabricates for himself a God superior and antagonistic to the God of humanity and nature. Any person who considers that being within the covers of the Bible imparts truth to its contents, is guilty of as aggravated idolatry and unmitigated fetichism, as the man who considers Godship contained within his idol, or that his idol can impart heavenly protection and superhuman instruction. We may revere the Bible as the yearnings of ignorant humanity after truth, or as the pious effusions of our religious nature without falling into Bible-idolatry. The man who subjects Bible assertions to his mental digestion, absorbing what is congenial, assimilating what is nutritious, and rejecting those extraneous and grotesque incongruities and dogmas which truth cannot incorporate ; that man has a healthy religion. The man who from reverence admits every proposition in Euclid as a truth, without trying to understand or analyse, is less actuated by the spirit of Euclid than the man who requires proof for every assertion. The same with the Bible.

NOTE 10.

Christians may say "God never doomed man to hell, for that would be cruelty or impotence. He only left it to Adam's *free* will to choose ;" the mock choice, however, was preordained, so that there was no freedom. If innate sin and inevitable perdition be the consequence—who was to blame ? He only created man with the full knowledge that he must go to hell unless redeemed by a plan pre-concocted between Him and His coadjutor, that the mimic death of the one was to supplement the failure of the other :—does the grossest heathen mythology contain such a compound of trash and nonsense as this ?

NOTE 11.

On what principle can the truth of this mythology be founded? Faith in God, Reason, and Morality all reject it as outrageously nonseusical and non-understandable. Its only evidence is Bible assertion; everything else that speaks to man's intellect, experience, to his sense of justice and truth, is against it, and demonstrates the fallacy of the imaginary doctrine; for even supposing the gospel descriptions of the crucifixion to be true, (though indeed there are some discrepancies hard to be reconciled), they completely fail as a sufficient basis for the theory; they do not prove the essential fact, Death, which even if proved would not necessitate or even authorize the absurd mythology and the mythical consequences.

The Gospels only testify as to the crucifixion of the *man* Jesus, but whether it was in mere derision or for the purpose of death, whether he was nailed or bound to the cross,* they leave uncertain. Death was merely the deduction of excited minds at a distance, which made them incompetent witnesses to a fact which they do not even pretend to have examined; there was no *post-mortem* examination, no decomposition, nor was death an obvious result as from decapitation; it was a natural conjecture of affection acted on by fear. The thieves were not dead, Pilate marvelled if he were already dead; there was a friendly centurion, and the time was quite insufficient ordinarily to cause death. Joseph and Nicodemus do not come forward as believers in his death; no other person is asserted to have seen him, to know whether his recovery was gradual or sudden, or when it took place, or how the spices were applied, until he was met *walking—clothed as a*

* In our authorised version, John's gospel alone (xix. 33, 34, xx. 27) mentions the piercing of the side, the print of the nails, and the not breaking the legs, and gives as a reason the appropriation of prophecy (36, 37). The water and the blood has also the appearance of being a mere doctrinal fact to agree with the fraudulent insertion (1 John v. 7), and to authorise the visionary inconceivable assertion (8), and if true, convicts the other gospels of culpable silence or defective inspiration for by them there was not a drop of blood shed on the cross—not enough to sprinkle a sparrow—if there was nailing would they not have mentioned it *ad misericordiam*? They would have dilated upon it though they had no pity to throw away on the thieves. "They took him down from the cross—or when they had taken," does not imply unnauling; the thieves' legs were broken, because probably they were nailed, and Jesus only bound—hanging on a tree does not imply nailed to a cross—bound is mentioned by old authorities; besides it was not the habit of the Jews to revile when inflicting capital punishment; the thieves were not reviled but Jesus was.

gardener. Is this a proof or disproof of death? In any other case no one would have a doubt. The balance of probabilities (indeed I might say of possibilities), is that he did not die on the cross. Ideal death necessitated the ideal miracle of Resurrection which was essential to raise the man Jesus into the God-Christ, and give a fanciful foundation to Paul's covenanting theory.

Is suspended animation for a few hours—which is quite conformable with the gospels—sufficient to change a man into very God? To make his sufferings equivalent to the eternal misery of all mankind? To verify a covenant between two gods, and to sustain all the anomalies and insults both to reason and to faith in the unity, power, wisdom and goodness of God?

NOTE 12.

John iii. 18. "He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already." 36. "He that believeth on the son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Mark xvi. 16. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Rom. x. 9. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

NOTE 13.

Paul, at Antioch, was the originator of this new gospel, and the New Testament was compiled by his proselytes. Thus a Church was formed, which developed the doctrine of the Athanasian creed; but there is no evidence that the majority of the Apostles ever adopted Paul's theory. They and their preaching are completely ignored in the New Testament; most likely they still retained their monotheistic ideas, and maybe for a short time expected the return of Jesus from Galilee as Messiah with power to establish the Jewish nation, but the new-formed Christian Church was exclusively of the Pauline section.

NOTE 14.

The Old Testament is a spurious compilation, and its sacredness is founded on falsehood. The Pentateuch was not written by Moses; the pagan story of Balaam and Balak, does not even pretend to have an Israelitish witness or author. The Psalms are

not *all* David's or of his epoch. Half of Isaiah is written by an unknown person, and after the Captivity. Daniel is a devotional romance, and not a history; and by a natural but pernicious growth, religious romances, allegories and hymns ultimately obtained sacred (though very erroneous) authority. The other books are mostly of unknown authorship and dates. Is it not absurd to try to build up a system of anomalous truth with such materials, or to endue their statements with inspiration merely to support Christianity, which is avowedly a fanciful conformation both of theory and fact? Even if coincidence was thus produced, it would be a mental fraud to call one a proof or corroboration of the other.

NOTE 15.

This assumption is the life of Christianity; with Christians it over-rules the whole providence of God, and perverts all the utterances of the Old Testament. It nullifies all other evidence; tinges all their reasoning; fabricates events into fulfilments, and appropriates, as divinely foretelling of Jesus, sayings which have no *real* application to him, and then claims that *allegorical* application legitimises the appropriation by imparting to it a fanciful significance, that coincidence with a conformed imaginary system gives reality and truth to both. If you set your watch to agree with another, could you argue that the agreement proved correct time? What respect can be paid to a belief composed of such mental frauds and imaginary facts, whose very existence is based on unevicenced abnormalities and audacious assumptions?

NOTE 16.

To get rid of this God-insulting dilemma in which we are placed by religious assumption, would it not be more efficacious, rational, normal and religious, to give up the supposition that God demeaned Himself by riddles and quibbles, than to try to contort facts and meanings into fulfilments, to vindicate God by violating honesty and reason, which Christians are compelled to do in order to avoid the other morally impossible and religiously disgusting alternative, the possibility of which is the creation of their false assumption?

NOTE 17.

This may be verified by almost every so called prophecy—but

let us illustrate it by the first, and by the Christians' most reliable type :—

Gen. iii. 15—"It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

This old saw is asserted to be the veritable words of God—but by whom, on what authority, or how transmitted, nobody can tell ; no person or probability bears witness to the fact, nor can we say when the belief originated. However, Christians assume it to be so, just as Pagans assume their stories ; the consequence is, it *must* have transcendent significance, and therefore Christians *again assume* that God hereby predicted and promised the birth of Jesus, though neither time, place, circumstances, or even nation are hinted at. Had it been mentioned in any of the Gospels, that Jesus in any of his walks trod on the head of a serpent, how Christendom would resound with "fulfilment," "coincidence," application proving *both* the divinity of the saying and the divinity of Jesus. But as there is not the remotest application to Jesus, Christians again assume the virginity of his mother—a pagan idea—thus to conform and give semblance of proof ; although during her lifetime and his, there does not appear to be the slightest rumour of any such belief, and if there was truth in the story, it would have been both an irreligious and impolitic deception not to have published it.

Yet on such frail surmises—not deserving the name of reason or evidence—rests the whole Christian structure, while it completely ignores the natural origin of the saying, viz., the religious expression of desire, hope, and faith, that ultimately civilization and mankind would triumph over their brutal enemies.

Now let us take the type of the Pascal Lamb (Ex. xii.), which from the days of Paul has been relied on as the title deed of Christianity. Its perfect application has been the subject of *millions of sermons*, it is in fact the creed of Christendom, yet it is a gross perversion produced by mental fraud and false piety. Let us analyse it. First then (verse 14) it is expressly stated to be "a memorial ordinance for ever." Christians turn it into a typical ordinance accomplished, and ending 1,850 years ago. 2nd : What significance is there to Jesus in taking a lamb or kid on the tenth day and keeping it till the fourteenth day ? 3rd : How can a lamb or kid under one year old represent an adult man of thirty-three years ? 4th : Does ordinary killing with a knife in the evening typify crucifixion in the day time ? 5th : What does roasting and eating typify ? 6th :

Does a separate lamb for each house typify only one lamb for every house or nation? 7th: Why is the main feature, three days' death and resurrection, untypified and omitted?!!

There is nothing in fact which points to Jesus, or which can be contorted into an application, excepting that his crucifixion took place at one of the 1,500 commemorations. The deaths and all the circumstances of the two *lamb*s are quite dissimilar. But Christianity cannot submit to plain truth, it must appropriate, and therefore uses this talismanic argument. The blood on the posts was the saving myth, consequently the mystical blood of Jesus sprinkled on our souls (whatever that means) is their salvation; and thus the whole thing is proved!! The facts!! the theory!! the logical reasoning!! and correct application are all proved by a fanciful conformation!!! Was there ever greater sophistry palmed on humanity to support audacious and grotesque conjecture?!! But even this tremendous power of overruling reason and evidence is not sufficient, for the conformity is not perfect. It was not the sprinkled doorposts that were saved, how can then it mean the sprinkled souls. Also no two families owed their saving to the blood of the same lamb, whereas the imaginary fulfilment requires every soul to be washed in the blood of the one lamb; besides as the Saviour's blood is only a conformed myth, and not a proved fact, the similitude proves nothing—neither the truth of itself nor the ideas out of which it springs—even though there was a reciprocal coincidence between them. So after all the contortion of facts, the prostitution of intellect, and the audacity of imputing to God to compel faith, its application to Jesus is an egregious failure. If the religious soul wishes to extract instruction from the ordinance, why not take a more obvious meaning? To commemorate freedom from slavery and to be an annual protest for ever against slavery.

The same system of misapplication is carried on in the New Testament, for instance, the illustrations of "the kingdom of heaven" (which evidently means righteousness and truth), are appropriated by the Church to Christianity alone. For that purpose the Church assumes—1st: That the preacher, Jesus, was Christ, God incarnate. 2nd: That by the kingdom of heaven he meant doctrinal Christianity; and 3rd: That the written were the actual spoken words, free from misconception, error, interpolation, or tinge of subsequent doctrine; those three assumptions mutually prove each other, because

in fact they are conformed for that purpose, and when they are granted disbelief is impossible ; the various divinely symbolised doctrines become proved facts ; every other consideration dwindles to nothing.

The wonder is how Christians can restrain fanaticism from nullifying the ordinary occupations of life, and making the spread of Christian belief the sole object and end of their existence. Inquisition, tortures, missionary labours, bribes, threats, frauds, falsehood, and force, that “by any means they may gain some,” is both more rational and religious than inoperative submission, or insincere belief. But all this sincerity is quite consistent with the admission being a tissue of egregious assumptions, and the consequent zeal, both resulting from and promoting a false religion.

NOTE 18.

Of the beliefs and inspirations of nine of the Apostles—for Christians impute equal inspiration to them as to the others—we know nothing from themselves. If they wrote, then there were many Gospels and various beliefs which are lost ; if they did not it was a waste of inspiration ; in either case an abortive miracle. At most we have only hearsay rumour of vague generalities about them. They are mentioned a few times *in globo* in the Gospels and Acts, and then dismissed into oblivion, or condensed into Peter and John. The solitary exclamation attributed by John (xx. 28) to Thomas, “My Lord and my God,” is to me an evident afterbirth, the product of subsequent dogma. It is almost impossible that a devout Jew, which Thomas was, could have used such an expression ; it relies *only* on *this* assertion ; the whole circumstance is ignored by all the others. This, together with the irreconcilable contradictions and the utter incongruity of the incident—a substantial human body gliding through a shut door, and yet retaining its solidity, its holes and its marks, is to me a blasphemy against the God of nature, truth and humanity ; a real murder of sense and intellect, a prostitution of our religious faculties ; it bears upon itself the stamp of audaciously and craftily devised pious fiction (as it asserts, verse 31) for the purpose of inducing belief in the superhumanity of Jesus, which it accomplished when it was admitted (A.D. 362) as a gospel truth. I think that there is no evidence that the nine, or any of them, or Joseph, Nicodemus, or any other person who was engaged in applying the reviving spices or *procuring* the human

clothing, believed in the DEATH and consequent resurrection, and certainly not in the atoning and vicarious principle which was the foundation of and chief reason for Paul's belief in *the fact*; and we know from his writings that there were doctrines antagonistic to his own in the primitive Church. That the nine Apostles may have expected His return with power from Galilee, where He was alternately hiding and showing Himself, is quite consistent with the tenor of the Gospel stories, though not authenticated, and that it ultimately became a belief as to His immediate return from wherever He was, to establish the Jewish kingdom, is probably giving to James's only expression on the subject ("the coming of the Lord draweth nigh") its real meaning, without necessitating his belief in resurrection from death, or cleansing with blood, or ascension into heaven, *to none of which does he even allude*, and if he believed in them silence would have been criminal.

NOTE 19.

During the first century, when Christian fanaticism was at a white heat, there were fabricated many unauthentic and fictitious lives of Jesus, dogmatical rumours were recorded as facts, and facts were forged by superstition to illustrate and establish Jesus-faith. They all claimed authorship from either an apostle or companion of Jesus, and were acknowledged and quoted by the early fathers as equally authentic. After being subjected for 300 years to the processes of compiling, copying, selecting fragments from one another, altering, amplifying, correcting, etc., to please the tastes, gratify the beliefs, and strengthen the faith of the devotees—for they alone would prize and go to the expense of manuscript copies—they were pronounced apocryphal (A.D. 362), excepting four which were made canonical and thereby elevated to godship, for previously none of them were considered inspired; the reason of naming four was "because there are four winds in heaven, and four corners to the earth," and the reason of their selection was not because they were genuine, but because they corroborated each other, and were in accordance with the then dominant doctrine; thus the whole providence of God and religion of man is built on the verbal accuracy of documents, whose defects as to original genuineness and authenticity, and the agglomerated falsehoods and fables of 300 years, mattered nothing, as they were all ratified by the decision of a Laodicean council imparting to

them inspiration. This is essential for Christian belief. Christianity could not be in being without it ; but it fails in identifying the gospels as we at present have them with those acknowledged A.D. 360. For instance, did Mark's then gospel contain the last twelve verses which are not to be found in the oldest manuscripts ? There are many other instances which show tampering with the text since that time ; what must have been the alterations before ? It is noteworthy that the tendency has always been to add to, to give a full and complete edition to the owner, extra value to the purchaser, and to supply extra food and strength to Jesus-worship.

NOTE 20.

The first three gospels make the ministry of Jesus one year, at least so the Church decided (A.D. 200) on the authority of Isaiah lxi. 2, and Luke iv. 19. The fourth gospel extends it to three or four years—surely this is discrepancy enough to falsify the one or the others or to invalidate the Church's decision. The fourth gospel is evidently a romance, of which Jesus is the hero, and the words of the author are put into his mouth ; in the same way the prestige of the apostle is obtained by ascribing to John the authorship, which is no proof whatever that it emanated from him, as it was the habit of the age and not considered fraudulent to do so ; at least the gain to religion overcame and sanctioned the deception. The unwitnessed conversation with the woman of Samaria, and the discourse in xiv., xv., xvi., xvii., xviii. illustrate my assertion that it is a romance.

NOTE 21.

The only way of protecting the gospels from the possibility of error is by the assumption of inspiration ; but this is merely an ideal protection, affecting only the assuming mind and not the matter narrated, which still remains true or false according to its coincidence with fact which is not altered—or created—by the assumption. If we absolutely and religiously assume truth (which is the church's teaching) we dispense with and absolutely defy evidence, no argument or reason can overcome the assumption or delusion, for whatever discrepancy appears between it and other truths, the other truths must yield to the pre-assumption, for assumption overleaps all the difficulties and doubts of deduction—this is the strength of dogma. But can we as either re-

ligious or rational beings assume to be truth what we perceive is wrong in principle, nonsensical in argument, and supported by false facts and fraudulent intentions? For instance, when I see the truth of Christianity based on three mystic fourteen generations (Mat. i. 17)—when I find on analysing it that no power in arithmetic can make out three fourteens, and when further I find that to accomplish this puerile approximation three generations are purposely omitted, what can I think of the arguments, facts, or honesty of the record, let alone the inspiration? Imputing inspiration to such a document is an insult to God.

NOTE 22.

It should always be recollected that the gospels were written long subsequent to Paul's epistles, and all the writers were of his section. The Gospels are therefore *ex parte* versions; their facts and sayings are tinctured by the doctrine they were written to support, they are mere records of the dominant belief of the second century.

NOTE 23.

To produce imaginary fulfilment of pseudo-prophecy was avowedly Paul's motive and chief reason for giving credence to the resurrection rumour, which he disbelieved for two years, when he had every opportunity of ascertaining the fact; and to create an historical justification for that belief was the object of the compilers of the gospels. It was doctrine and not evidence of fact that produced this change; he did not investigate facts but appropriated prophecy, and went to Arabia for three years to study Philo's theories and concoct his gospel. He seizes on the idea of resurrection with avidity; a miracle was required and was consequently believed, death was proved by Jesus being seen after his crucifixion! by the fanciful application of prophecy! and by being essential for resurrection! and to confirm this he states that Jesus was buried, which is contrary to the gospel account, which was that he was brought into a spacious sepulchre or chamber. His arguments and assumptions may be summed up thus: A sacrificial death was necessary; therefore Jesus died as a sacrifice. That resurrection of the body required illustration, therefore Jesus's resurrection is a proved fact; otherwise the dead rise not, we are yet in our sins, and believers in Jesus are of all people the most miserable, their faith is vain, their vicarial hopes are vain; therefore assume the fact rather than discard a fal-

lacious belief, although this latter alternative would be more rational, more honest, and equally efficacious in throwing off vain hope and extra misery. But Paul's advice has been acted on. Therefore Death and Resurrection are proved facts!! hopes are realised!! and all Christian doctrines become commands from God!!

NOTE 24.

All those assumptive beliefs despise reason, because they are not founded on reason, and bear no allegiance to reason. Yet Christianity presumes to call itself a rational religion! Is this honesty? Christians are compelled by the nature of things to admit that apprehension must precede belief, but as an evident absurdity cannot be apprehended, they make a mock appeal to reason, and try to deceive her with a sophism. They say, we derive eternal truths from inspired evidence, and thereby prove *absolute facts*; on this mental shuffle all their rationality is based, for *imputed* inspiration only produces hypothetical truths which involve *imaginary* facts. None of them are brought into the region of absolute reality by the logical process, it is an insane delusion to fancy that they are. That the moon will in *fact* become blood, because we *impute* inspiration to the dictum, is certainly not rational. That Jesus sits on the right hand of God, dictating to him, is as repugnantly absurd and sustained only by a similar imputation. No logic can transmute imagination into objective fact, or idea into entity. Yet this is the metamorphical juggle that puzzles confiding humanity and establishes the Christian faith.

NOTE 25.

This assertion will astonish Christians, for they attribute every blessing of civilization to Christianity. Its moral code is in principle perfect, a great advance on paganism, but it did not originate with Jesus; it had been acknowledged and advocated previously by other religions; it does not constitute Christianity. Christianity is the belief that the crucifixion of Jesus imparts heaven to every one who believes the mythical story, and hell to all that reject it, monopolising God's mercies and condemning all others to His eternal wrath; and this belief has been the cause of more iniquity than all the natural wickedness of mankind put together; cruelty almost always exists with false religions; it is the perversion, over-stimulating of the religious faculty and not (as clergymen preach) the want of it, that

has when misdirected produced the greatest evils that have disgraced humanity, and is not cruelty almost inseparable from the above faith? The inquisition tortures were only following God's example; a mild hell, a merciful punishment, the persecution of the Jews, the crusades, the debasement of science, mental and moral dishonesty, a silly superstitious frame of mind are its results; nevertheless Christian organisation and morality—not its belief—have produced inestimable blessings to mankind.

NOTE 26.

Any system that endeavours to force man's silly devices upon God, or to coerce our belief in them as God's ordinances against our perception of truth, or that imputes to God nonsensical sayings, irrational conclusions, capricious cruelty, or imaginary promises, is dishonouring to God, for accepting falsehood is as dishonouring as rejecting truth; allegiance to a usurper is disloyalty; in both cases the God-degrading property, and the evil effects on our own minds, are the same; Christians seem to imagine there can never be an excess of belief—"Believe all things" is their motto.

NOTE 27.

Christians consider that this belief elevates man by producing an absorption of godship into man. Let them ponder. Does attributing godship to one man elevate the race as much as believing that God permeates humanity by the intellectual and moral faculties which He has given us? The one is an arrogant imputation, the other a fact, and necessitates the duty of using these faculties honestly and correctly in His service, that is, in ascertaining truth and governing conduct; any system which ignores them, or subjugates them to tyrannical religious assumption, is a degradation to man.

Any system which creates fictitious sins—imposes false duties—imputes guilt to the God-ordained and inevitable, contorts truth to established religious ideas, and makes our very nature and existence an offence to our Creator, is a degradation to man and a libel against God, which abnormal belief cannot remedy.

NOTE 28.

Christian reader, you may find in the foregoing many assertions which lacerate your most cherished beliefs, affections, and associations; but I hope you will not find any expression against true piety

or religion, for I consider these as essential to humanity as reason is ; a deficiency in either of them would be a lamentable imperfection. It is against their perversion alone that I argue, and I do consider that the Christian scheme is sustained by a perversion of them all. Faith and reliance on God—the unity of the universe—does not imply faith in the Bible as His revelation. The endeavour to ascertain and act according to His laws and the exigencies of our nature for the production of good and happiness, does not imply the necessity for a vicarious saviour, or the divinity and atonement of Jesus; nor does the desire to please God—the religious faculty which is dominant within us—imply a vile and sinful nature ; but they do involve the study and contemplation of all phenomena and events as the manifestation of His will, and as a guide to our conduct; this constitutes our duty towards God. And the endeavour to act accordingly, controlling the selfish instinct by restraining unjust gratifications while we expand their requirements equally to others, thus making justice, mercy, industry, and benevolence our actuating principles ; this constitutes our duty towards man, and our conduct to inferior animals, and our social position as the results. Those two duties comprise the whole duty of man ; they are the consummation and union of man's intellectual and moral faculties, faith and practice combined, while dogmatical religion is anti-rational and degrading, it imposes extra duties and thereby multiplies sins; it produces phantom fears to sustain imaginary salvation, and tries to factify poetic fancies (such as the incarnation of the deity by the union of the holy spirit with pure virginity), thus fabricating a family of myths, conjectures and fallacies which usurp the name and authority of religion.

APPENDIX.

ASSUMPTIVE RELIGION.

RELIGIOUS assumption is the strongest conviction of which the human mind is capable. It can by imputation transmute a stick into a god, an idea into an entity, a falsehood into a truth, and a belief into a fact; but those changes are mere delusions, no actual change takes place. The fabrications of assumption do not alter the ordinances of God, nor create truth where there is not a coincidence with fact; assuming fact to create truth is evidently a mental fraud.

Conviction the result of reason is modest and diffident, but conviction the result of religious assumption is intolerant and dogmatic; for the mind ruled by religious assumption, being conscious of its own sincerity, that is of the truth and overwhelming power of its belief, naturally confuses and confounds this with the truth of the thing believed. It being true that you dreamed does not make the thing you dreamed true; yet this is a sophism largely indulged in by religious assumptions.

If a man sincerely assumes an idol to be his God, or that by means of charmed paint or mystic rites he can impart godship to a stick, the sincerity of his belief will be in proportion to the audacity and irrationality of the assumption; for if there is any thing of modesty, doubt or deduction, so far will the absolute belief be weakened, for conviction and doubt cannot coexist. To absolute and sincere belief a doubt is incongruity; to doubt the godship of the idol, or the potency of the charm would be to the prepossessed mind a wicked absurdity, a suggestion of the devil conflicting with his supreme religious truth. Reason rejects simultaneous belief and denial; this gives

intensity to assumed beliefs, while the religious idea imparts both energy and protection.

To Christians it is evident that the idolater's assumption, though sincere, is false; that it has no effect on the *stick*, that it only produces ideal facts in the assuming mind, the stick remaining precisely as it was before: that the ideal facts are contrary to God's ordained laws, and conflict with obvious truths, producing absurdities; still their potency on him is tremendous and irresistible. But, Christian, do you ever apply this reasoning to your own case? Do you ever feel that the intensity and sincerity of your belief is no proof whatever of the truth of the thing believed? That the whole scheme in which you so ardently believe is merely an imaginary fact caused by religious assumption, and may have no existence at all in the real ordinance of God, though it has tremendous and irresistible power upon yourself? It may be false! If your belief, like the idolater's, is irrational assumption, it will not yield to, or acknowledge reason; imaginary facts in your mind become indestructible realities, and like all other delusions you may believe them with insane intensity, unalloyed by a ray of reason or a doubt of reality. But is this religion? Is this worshipping with the intellect, or giving up our faculties to the service of God and truth?

Now, though the above is actually the case with most Christians, very few are willing to admit that their religion is in essence the same as that of the idolaters—assumptive religion. They know that religion speaks to us as rational beings, and they persuade themselves that they believe on rational evidence; if so, they admit that their belief should be amenable to reason, that it should be tentative, and not dogmatic; that facts require evidence; that deductions should be correct; that incongruous assumptions should not be admitted; and that the production of absurdity proves falsehood in the premises. If the religious idea is used to control reason, or to dictate to the sense of truth, then are they on a par with the pagan, and cannot object to the most rabid nonsense as a religious belief.

The imputation of godship degrades, and engenders dishonesty of mind ; whether the object of religious belief be animal or image, visible or ideal, book or oracle, omen or type, the effect is the same. The announcement must be true, *because it is God that speaks*. This is a superstition in common with Jews, Pagans and Christians. If truth can be contorted from the announcement—and every ingenuity is used to that effect—it proves to the votary the divinity of the announcer and confirms his belief. If it cannot, it is on account of misinterpretation of an ambiguous utterance, of deficient knowledge, or some omission or commission which broke the charm or angered God ; but in no case is it allowed to disprove the assumption. Is not this the history of Christianity as well as of Idolatry ? The dogmatists defy reason, while the scholastics, from before Luther's time, when dogma first began to be questioned and sought for some rational support, down to the present, as exemplified by Messrs. Maurice and Kingsley, take refuge in subtleties, in contorted meanings, in dishonest deductions, in any ingenuity rather than admit the fallibility of dogma or untruth in the Scripture. And now with regard to the individual mind, do not you yourself resort to the same subterfuges for the same purpose—supporting Bible supremacy and suppressing honest doubt ? You should and must know that just conclusions are not compatible with this frame of mind, that God will not be mocked, and will not reveal truth to dishonest reason. Therefore if we reason at all, let us reason righteously and correctly ; if we desire truth, let us ensue it.

I have heard many sermons and read many books plausibly, religiously, and logically upholding the Christian scheme, but they invariably assume the truth of Christianity from which they deduce the truth of Christianity and call this proof ! or at least corroboration ; they appropriate all the resulting moralities, and use them as existing religious duties to beget their own parent assumption ; is not this fraudulent reasoning in a vicious circle ? For instance, instead of saying—the Christian scheme is man's theory of God's plan of salvation ; they say—the Christian scheme is God's plan of salvation ; it is consequently war-

ring against God to oppose it, it is sin to disbelieve it, etc., Then the resulting submission and belief is used to prove the actuality of God's plan; for of course they harmonise, one being derived from the other, but that does not remove it from theory into reality or fact. "How can we refuse such great salvation! arraign God's wisdom! reject His astounding love! nullify His miracle!" Certainly not; if we admit the story, those sentiments flow as a matter of course, but they do not in the slightest degree factify the admission, rather the reverse, for they have no existence, and consequently no effect outside of it; they blow up the admission into intense fervour, but they do not overcome any of the incongruities, or make the story a whit more probable. Most religions assume the right of awarding heaven and hell on their own conditions; when this is admitted, the conditions become supremely imperative, overcome every obstruction, and dwarf every other motive; but they do not rationalise or verify the admission which still retains its assumptive character, and they all vanish on the assumption being disputed. The terms which Christianity imposes are to admit that the blood of Jesus (mystically applied by faith) cleanses from all sin; that the believer's sins are washed out by the blood of an imaginary lamb or kid, which is synonymous with Jesus; that this myth changes eternal misery and God's enmity to us into eternal happiness and His favour. The intense desire of appropriating this reward gives faith in the promise and gladly admits the assumed truth, thus unifying the whole into a symmetrical scheme; but not proving or imparting to it a particle of fact, it still remains a mirage of imagination, stimulated by spiritual *delirium tremens* (as in Acts vii. 55, 56). Sober religion cannot envy those delirious joys, which it pronounces contrary to all God's obvious dealings and laws, a fictitious system, inimical to man's moral perceptions, his sense of truth, his reason, and derogatory to his exalted ideas of God. It is satisfied with the joys of faith in the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, and our identity therewith; the consciousness that we are His offspring; that our very existence is in obedience to His will and accomplishing His designs, with the delights of

meditating on His laws, and endeavouring to perform what He requires of us, which we know is for our own benefit and enjoyment, together with the certainty that His loving-kindness did not create us for misery, and the resulting happiness of gratitude and thanksgiving expressed in prayer and praise. Those true religious joys the Theist shares with the Christian, he only rejects the hyperbolical, and corrects assumption by reason and science, and by an elevated idea of that incomprehensible Power and Perfection which we unify in God.

ON THE PREVALENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ; ITS CAUSES AND EFFECTS.

As title is often decided by the fact of possession, and right by might, so the prevalence of Christianity is a decisive popular argument as to its title to truth. "What everyone believes must be true" is a good and safe *prima facie* reason, but a little consideration will show that it is often capable of refutation or explanation, for the same argument would have proved the truth of Pagan stories for many ages ; would now over a large portion of the globe prove Mahometanism, besides many universally accepted "truths," such as alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, etc., which are now exploded as falsehoods. Prevalence is a *de facto* and not a *de jure* argument ; therefore when the original title is disputed it is not admissible ; besides even in fact it did not then exist.

The pure morality inculcated by Christianity is not Christianity itself, nor is it an essential or unique property of the faith, but merely a non-intrinsical accident. Other religions previous to Jesus have inculcated the same, therefore the divinity of Jesus can not be deduced from them, neither do they become duties (as Christians affirm), because they were enunciated by him, but on account of their intrinsical value. This removes them from the narrow pale of Christianity and takes from Christianity the monopoly of those virtues ; nevertheless it is to them, and the immensely enhanced value given by them to our present life, that the prevalence and permanence of Christianity

may be attributed. No doubt the belief in the divinity of Jesus and his second coming fanatically promoted the growth of his morality, which ultimately agglomerated the piety and charity of the civilised world around the dominant Church; but this no more proves the divinity of Jesus than the grandeur of Imperial Rome proves the divinity of Romulus; they were both the results of the principles of growth, successful organisation and the laws of nature and humanity, and not of the divinity of their founders; fraud or force, dishonest monopoly, avaricious or fanatical enthusiasm disregarding truth and justice, were in both cases causes of dominion, though that dominion may have proved beneficial. One superstition was necessary to counteract the other. Christian virtues unsustained by Christian superstition could not have overcome prevalent and endowed heathenism: but now we may dispense with the husk of superstition without injuring the fruit.

If the essential facts and doctrines of Christianity were for 1500 years accepted by the intellect of mankind—as is premised—I admit it would be very strong evidence as to their reality and truth, almost enough to bar the re-opening of the question; but I deny that this was the case. The intellect of mankind never accepted them during the whole of that period (1500 years); faith and intellect were considered antagonistic; dogma did not appeal to intellect but to faith in itself. It demanded that intellect should be smothered, that reason and science should not interfere with religion; not merely protecting under the name of religion the myths, subtleties and prehistoric assumptions, but also historical statements and alleged facts; they should not be doubted or the evidence which supported them criticised. By its tremendous bribes, threats, and powerful organization it got the ascendancy, and thus numbers of intellectual, pious and timid men submitted to dogma as dealing with matters which were beyond the faculties of reason and sense. They therefore discarded criticism of dogmatical statements as impious, and as a religious duty strained their intellects to the utmost to acquiesce, and if possible to reconcile, and thus they became sincere, pious, but not intellectual, believers. What they believed in as

truth was not evidenced to them, and is not confirmed to us by their acceptance. The church-unanimity produced by expelling all who presume to differ, or doubt a creed reiterated hebdomadally by all the churches for centuries, adds not a scintilla of proof as to the original truth, which remains exactly as it was, and we can analyse it as well as they. Accepting prevalent beliefs as established truths would doom mankind to perpetual ignorance and superstition, or the conviction that repetition of belief makes an objective fact of what was originally but a rumour or conjecture, though an essential church doctrine, is a violation of our mental nature.

Can anyone maintain that baptising armies by wholesale, sprinkling them with brooms from buckets, turned them into intelligent receivers of the faith; or that choosing baptism in preference to death, or even accepting it as a passport to heaven, turned ignorant pagans into credible witnesses of the truth—a cloud of witnesses; or because few persons except the Jews, for a mere negation, were willing to incur persecution, it amounted to intellectual acceptance; or that prevalence caused by penal laws vouches for truth; or even because many, from conscientious conviction selected Christianity, *in globo*, in preference to Paganism or Atheism—the only choice left them, because the Church was for ages the only refuge for pious, peace-loving men? All this with the tremendous endowments and organisation is surely enough, without having resort to divine interposition or intrinsic truth, to account for the prevalence of Jesuism. But is prevalence obtained by these means to be taken as proof of the correctness of its facts and doctrines? The Catholicity caused by the union of Jewish and Pagan beliefs with Hellenic Christianity, the product of a burst of fanaticism on ignorant credulity is prevalent enough; but surely this intolerant universality is no evidence of truth to an enlightened age. The veriest tyro now has more religious as well as scientific knowledge than was possessed by the clergy of the church during the dark ages, as well as more liberty in using it, and more advantages in applying it. Are we called upon to give up these advantages and to adopt the beliefs of ignorance as religion merely on

account of their prevalence? Is the question of truth to be decided by the implicit acquiescence of our uncriticising forefathers, extorted from them by threats of hell and excommunication? We can investigate better than they, and it is our duty to do so.

When we cease to investigate God's dealings, His providence, His laws, and our connection with and duties regarding them, then we cease to be religious; but when we investigate with pre-determination, purposely misusing our faculties and suborning our decisions, then we cease to be righteous; when we adopt the grotesque fancies and assumed facts or incongruities of prevalent beliefs in preference to those evidenced by our senses, reason, accumulated experiences, and moral faculties, then we sever truth from religion, apprehension from belief, we remove ourselves from God's kingdom of Facts, into a fanciful Elysium of our own. Is not this virtually Atheism, or ignoring the God of the Universe as manifested to us by our faculties?

ON THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF CHRISTIANITY.

It is interesting to trace the history of Christian belief, and see the various phases it assumed. It seems to me to have two main origins, the one Jewish and the other Greek.

The Essenes, of whom John the Baptist is a type, were a Jewish sect who based their religion on repentance, a pure life, ascetic discipline, the rite of baptism, and looking forward to a Messiah to redeem Israel.

There was at the same time a similar religious movement in the Gentile world. A Christian church was established in many places, and had many and ardent supporters; anointing was their rite, holy oil their superstition; they agreed with the Essenes in many things (even as to the mystic influence of their several rites), the rejection of absurd mythology; the belief in One supreme, and in purity of life. The Essene maxims were, however, Jewish; the Christian were noble Grecian sentiments, as afterwards enunciated by Paul, who does not seem to have derived them mediately or immediately from Jesus; both

sects seem devoted not to priestcraft but rather to preaching and individual purity.

It is impossible to say what were Jesus's opinions of Messiahship, for all his sayings come to us through the medium of intense advocacy, which would of course seek for and fabricate his authority. He commenced as an Essene, and very likely considered himself as raised up by God to regenerate Israel, and demanded and received personal reverence from his followers, but beyond this we cannot say. However, one thing is certain, that whatever Messianic ideas were attached to him, not having been accomplished before his absconding into Galilee after his crucifixion, his disciples looked with hope for his immediate return to fulfil them; but when the belief in his death and miraculous resurrection and ascension took possession of their minds, he and his mission thence assumed a religious superhumanity instead of a political heroic, and the fervour of this belief was intensified by the ideal miracle. Now as everything has a tendency to grow, the belief in this miracle made other miracles possible, and thus produced rumours of miraculous birth, temptation, etc., of which there is not a particle of evidence during his life-time; those rumours became *beliefs*, and were ultimately fabricated into *facts* by being recorded in the Gospels, which became sacred and inspired for recording them; thus, after the lapse of a century or so, was produced the Jesus of the Gospels, who ultimately became the Christ of Christendom.

Some years after the crucifixion, when the faith was in a plastic state, a new moulding power arose and imparted to it shape and substance, which it has retained ever since. That power was Paul. He saw that purposeless miracles are futile; it was necessary to supply a suitable object and end to give them significance; and although this was already done in some degree, by the *expectation* of the second coming, yet it was but vague and unfounded; it required to be connected with Jewish scriptures to give it any hold on the Jewish mind. He was a rigid Jew, skilled in cabalistic lore, and of undoubting Jewish faith. He believed that all the promises and prophecies of the Old

Testament must be fulfilled ; that God was coerced by the words of those whom he assumed to be His prophets to bring about the facts. Yet he saw that the Jewish religion was a failure ; that the prophecies were unfulfilled ; that *actual* fulfilment was impossible, but that by *allegorical* imagination imputed fulfilment might be achieved. Permeated by this idea, acted upon by the sincere faith displayed by Stephen and others, his doubts and remorse concerning their persecution were brought to a climax by the sunstroke near Damascus ; all of which caused him to retire for three years to Alexandria (the head quarters of the Hellenists and Christians), where he elaborated his reconciling theory by admitting as a fact, without further evidence, what he had heretofore sincerely and persistently denied—the death and resurrection of Jesus. He thus obtained the required Christ ; and by uniting Jesus and Christ, he united the disciples and the Christians into one church. His uniform preaching was that “Jesus is the Christ ;” by persuading that his death was an atonement for the sins of the whole world, he gave to it an astounding religious importance ; by preaching that his voluntary death procured the salvation of mankind, he produced a transcendent Messiah ; that his blood washed away our sins was a fulfilment of Jewish type, *therefore a fact* ; that he was a propitiatory sacrifice, etc., etc. ; and deriving those monstrous imaginations from Jewish rites and Jewish scripture, and therefore fancifully transmuting them into facts, he not only pacified the Jews (himself included), but gave an enhanced significance to their cherished beliefs, by imparting apparent life and truth to what was really effete and false. His success is a matter of history ; his theory became dominant, and has ruled the mind of Christendom ever since.

The next phase which Christianity assumed was that of intense fanaticism engendered by these doctrines (this was the birth-time, or at least the growing infancy of our present Gospels). Ignoring every knowledge excepting Christ crucified, and trying to follow that example, placing all the duties, pleasures, and exigencies of humanity, and everything relating to this world in antagonism with

eternal salvation, the contempt, or rather hatred of everything pertaining to this life was regarded as a proof of sanctity. Our bodies were vile; the whole dispensation was accursed; every occupation except prayer and penance was a sin; every mortification of the body, mind, or nature was meritorious. Starvation, celibacy, solitude, penance, filth, ignorance, and especially martyrdom, were the qualifications for saints and passports to heaven. Thus was the calendar filled with saints, and the deserts with hermits and Stylites. This constituted Christianity for centuries, was the main characteristic for upwards of one thousand years and still leaves its marks on every sect, and on every individual who follows Paul's doctrines. Simultaneously with the above there was another growth going on. The organisation of the Church, the proselytising zeal and unity of the Christians made them very powerful, their preachers became very influential, and their bishops absolute rulers as to doctrine and discipline; ultimately they became the dispensers of salvation and the awarders of hell-fire: they were a power not to be despised. The State, therefore, acknowledged the Church as an imperial institution, and enforced their decrees by secular power interfered in their factions, patronising sometimes the one and sometimes the other party, till the wealth and power of the Church becoming prodigious and universal, it at length controlled the State and usurped its functions. During all this time Christianity meant allegiance to the Church: but as there were two contending Churches (the Greek and Roman), and several contending doctrines, sometimes one getting the ascendancy and sometimes the other, and each anathematising the other, the spirit of love, the very life of the religion of Jesus seems to have quite disappeared. Malice, hatred, cruelty, ascetism, despotism were the motive energies of Christianity; while even the fundamental doctrines and facts—not only the disputed subtleties—were impressed more as corollaries of the supreme admission—the infallibility or godship of the Church—than on account of their moral truth. Submission of belief and practice followed, as a matter of course; every dogma is established, every Church decree is indisputable, whether

excommunication, deposition, dispensation, indulgences, or the vice-godship of the Pope. The efficacy of saints and relics, the worship of the Virgin Mary, of Jesus, and even of God were accepted more as doctrines of the Church, as derivatives from its infallible immunity from error, than as possessed of intrinsic truth or of moral necessity; for disputing the authority of the Church was heresy, denying her dogmas was blasphemy, disobedience to her dictates was rebellion against God—all sins more direful than a life of crime. A life of the most abandoned profligacy, malicious cruelty, or selfish dishonesty and violence could be atoned for by submission to the Church, by filling her coffers, performing her politic penances, or executing her exterminating decrees; but the heresy and blasphemy of disputing, denying, or disobeying justly earned the fiercest devisable punishment in this world and hell-fire in the next. This was Catholic or Church Christianity, and it was truly universal, for there was none other from the days of Constantine (A.D. 325) to the days of Luther (A.D. 1525), one thousand two hundred years; and even now allegiance to the Church and obedience to her dictates—ignoring understanding and evidence of truth—is the actuating religion of the great majority of Christians.

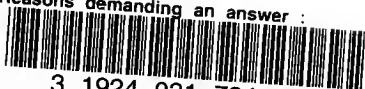
The solid mass of superstitions thus engendered and endowed could not be thawed by exposure to reason until it drifted into a more congenial atmosphere. The Reformers were only half emancipated, they still retained their slavish habits, and were as bigoted and dogmatic as the Catholics they attacked. The Reformation was merely a limit to the application of dogma, not a denial of its right or an assertion of the rights of reason; it only tried to lop off excrescences and to bring back the faith to that of the Apostolic times. It never entered into the reformers' minds to doubt the divinity of the canonical Scriptures although they upset the authority of the Church, which alone made the writings canonical, and imparted to them truth or genuineness, independent of every other consideration. Yet they dogmatically insisted on the facts and doctrines of the thus impugned bible being axiomatically

received, but allowed individual interpretation; thus making the appeal to reason a mere pretence, while they authorised numerous meanings, thus splitting Christianity into a variety of sects mutually throwing each other into hell-fire; for each sect fancying themselves the few elect consigned all others as rubbish to the flames. This must ever be the case as long as Paul's theories and gospel stories are made the foundation of religion—stories doctrinally conceived, assumptively evidenced, miraculously contorted, arising out of Jesus worship, and designed solely to promote that worship; and theories containing many sublimities at that time current with the Greek philosophers and Hebrew preachers, but perverted by Paul's allegorical fancies; so that the religious benefit is more than neutralised by the fanatical superstitions which of necessity must arise from the doctrine that nullifies everything else, and builds up the whole of God's providence on the abnormal, fanciful, exclusive, and miraculous. Hyperbolically prizing themselves as God's elect, and despising others as God's rejected, must lead to insolent spiritual domination and pitiless persecution, cruelty that extends their faith or exterminates their opponents becomes mercy. The inquisition, fire, sword and torture become religious duties, and are but weak and mild imitations of their God's maliciously penal government. This is at present the common phase of Christianity. The Church of Rome and the Protestant sects confine salvation to their own pale or essential beliefs. But thank God! the instinctive religion of mankind and civilization more than counteract their pernicious doctrines, and, I think, are destined ultimately to vanquish Pauline Christianity.

H. S.

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